

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS PER ADDENDUM NO. 1

General Questions

1. **Question:** How does one submit an application online? Is there an online application format or do we write the proposal as outlined and submit it through a designated portal? A brief explanation will help.

Answer: Please refer to <https://bids.hctx.net/bsa>. Online submittal instructions are listed under Job No. 20/0333.

2. **Question:** Will randomized controlled trials be prioritized when possible?

Answer: Random Control Trials (RCT) are preferred, when possible. The County would like evaluations to use scientific methods. We realize that RCTs are not always possible with certain programs.

3. **Question:** Do you have an estimated number of projects?

Answer: No. We don't have an estimated number of project, however, the County is open to funding one (1) project at \$10 million, but it is more likely that there will be between two (2) – five (5) projects funded.

4. **Question:** It seems like the County might have both public health and education/social services programs through this - which might be very different types of evaluation - would you consider having two evaluators?

Answer: Yes. If multiple evaluators are needed because programs are substantially different or evaluators bring different expertise to the table, the County is open to having more than one (1) evaluator. In the application process, the vendor should include expertise and types of programs it has evaluated in the past.

5. **Question:** Should evaluation proposers assume that each evaluator is testing one (1) program? Or that each evaluator is testing each separate program (or some hybrid approach)?

Answer: The vendor should structure their proposed budget as if they're evaluating more than one (1) program, unless they're only suited to evaluate one (1) type of program (e.g. education). Please indicate in the budget if you have the capacity to evaluate more than one (1) program.

6. **Question:** Has the County had any discussion or ideas in terms of the number of participants needed in an evaluation (e.g. random sample size in an RCT) given the number of participants served in a project?

Answer: Because projects are not yet determined, there is no threshold for numbers of participants in evaluation. Any proposed budget will need to be negotiable on the backend. The County acknowledges that it is difficult to design a proposal for evaluating a project that is undetermined. We are soliciting applications for evaluators and implementers at the same time, because it is our hope that these processes move forward together. Evaluators will work closely with implementers from the very beginning and will be used to help structure these programs for rigorous evaluation.

7. **Question:** How and when will funded projects be selected?

Answer: The implementers' RFP process is the same timeline as the evaluators' RFP process. All proposals are due February 15th, so projects and evaluators will be selected sometime after that.

8. **Question:** Is there a preference for in-state or on-site presence for the evaluator?

Answer: The County doesn't have a preference for in-state. We want to hear from evaluators across the country. The County will be looking at what perspective and experience the evaluator brings and expertise in early childhood program evaluation. On-site support is flexible, depending on the need and COVID-19 precautions.

9. **Question:** Is an organization allowed to bid for both implementation and evaluation if appropriate firewall is in place?

Answer: Yes. However, ideally the County would like evaluations to be independent, so if a vendor applies and is selected for both evaluation and implementation we would need to be clear about the "firewall" in place.

10. **Question:** Is it a conflict of interest if we (independent evaluators) are currently working with a group that is applying for the project side of this grant?

Answer: It depends on the context, and it doesn't preclude an application. Disclosure of any ties to an implementer is necessary, once it is known who will be participating. The County wants to make sure any evaluation is structured so that it is independent.

11. **Question:** Will the evaluator play a role in the selection of the implementers to ensure that it is possible to rigorously evaluate the selected programs?

Answer: The RFP selection process is confidential. If the County determines later, however, that it makes more sense to wait until the chosen evaluators have an opportunity to get a sense for the programs they would evaluate before deciding to participate, we may consider that. As it stands, that is not a part of our RFP selection process.

12. **Question:** How does the County recommend bidders discuss potential tradeoffs in evaluation design and data collection options? Would the County recommend that bidders highlight a range of options or choose one (1) approach?

Answer: The vendor should highlight the range of options they are capable of undertaking, but choose the type you think is generally best suited for evaluating early childhood programs.

13. **Question:** Will the County be looking for evaluators to create partnerships amongst themselves? Or a core evaluation partner?

Answer: The County is open to evaluators creating partnerships amongst themselves, as well as contracting with one (1) core evaluator who sub-contracts other evaluators.

14. **Question:** Is this more of an RFQ or RFP process? Is it focused on qualifications as opposed to price or both?

Answer: A set of evaluation criteria has been established. Please see the Evaluation Criteria section, page 15 of 31. Pricing is only ten percent (10%) of the criteria. A substantial portion of the criteria is qualifications, approach, and experience. Pricing is a small component, to the extent that the County wants to ensure pricing is fair and reasonable in light of market value of services.

Evaluation Structure

15. **Question:** Will the evaluation of proposals rely largely on data collected by programs themselves or will the evaluation partner be conducting a data collection effort independent of this? If so, does the County expect to see in-person assessments of children and families to assess outcomes of interest?

Answer: The County wants a rigorous and independent evaluation. Our aim is for the evaluator to help structure and develop data collection systems rather than rely entirely on the program implementers. A partnership will be developed between the implementer and evaluator that will help determine what method of data collection is needed for the project (e.g. in-person, virtual). An out-of-state group could potentially partner with a local group for in-person support of data collection.

16. **Question:** Would the County facilitate or provide access to administrative data to assist the evaluation, if necessary?

Answer: Yes, the County will support data collection and the evaluation process. Some of the data may need to come from outside of the County, however, but we can assist with facilitation of this data.

Potential Implementers

17. **Question:** What types of programs does the County anticipate funding? (e.g., home visiting programs, Local Education Agency (LEA)-based preschool, community-based programs?)

Answer: The County is open to many different types of programs, but we're primarily looking at programs that will serve children aged zero (0) – three (3), are able to reduce disparities seen in Harris County, and can be rigorously evaluated using scientific methods. Topics of interest are listed in the RFP.

18. **Question:** Will bidders for evaluation have any sense of what the selected programs will be (beyond what you highlighted of potential interest from the bridgespan review)?

Answer: Currently no, as the RFPs for both the Implementation and Evaluation components are being conducted simultaneously. If we determine later, however, that it makes more sense to wait until the chosen evaluators have an opportunity to get a sense for the programs they would evaluate before deciding to participate, we may consider that.

Application Requirements

19. **Question:** On page 14 of 31, it states proposers may submit an indirect cost waiver. However, this is not referenced anywhere else in the RFP. Would you please if this does not apply?

Answer: This language has been removed from the specifications, please refer to page 14 of 31 per Addendum No. 1.